

Throw a **COLOR BLAST** Party ★ Learn to French Braid

American Girl

americangirlmagazine.com

**8 fantasy
cupcakes**

* Solve a
Valentine's Day
mystery

* **Quiz:** Which
treat are you?

February 2012

\$4.95US \$5.95CAN



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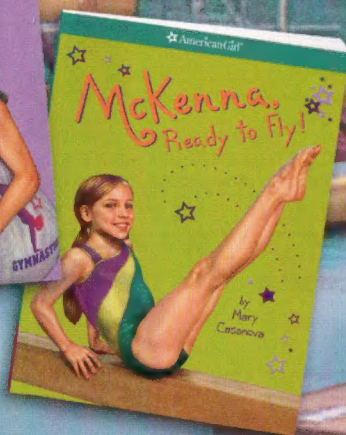
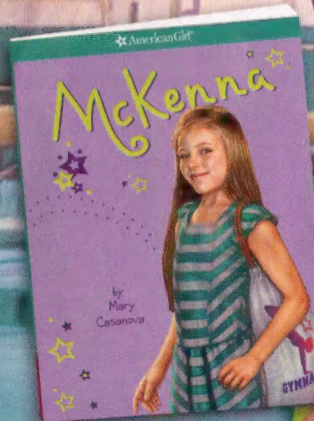
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Plus!

You asked for it:
A winter-themed
color-in poster



She's a determined girl who uses her strengths to turn challenges into triumphs.



Learn about
McKenna's
Take the
Challenge!
contest
See inside back
cover for details.

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Safety first!

Some of our projects and activities require an adult's help.

When you see this symbol, be sure to ask an adult to work with you.

Girls

E X P R E S S

Paper Petals

Make a bouquet of pretty flowers with a few simple supplies.

1. Stack five 4-inch squares of **colored tissue paper**. Fold the stack in half, and then in half again, to make a smaller square.
2. Use **regular scissors** to cut an arc across the tissue paper. Then make a tiny snip at the bottom corner. Use **pinking shears** or **scrapbook scissors** to make a decorative edge on the arc.



Cut here and here.

3. Carefully unfold the square. Slip the snipped corner over the top of a **bendy straw**, and pinch the tissue to the straw. Wrap tightly with **tape**.



Meet an AG Reader

Marie M.
Age 10, Pennsylvania

I live in Pennsylvania with my parents and siblings.

My favorite funny word: nutball

One thing most people would never guess about me: I hate pink! I have a lot of pink clothes (such as the shirt I'm wearing above) so it probably looks as if I love pink. But it's my least-favorite color.

A time I wanted to disappear: One time a bird pooped right on my head! I had to sit in the car for 30 minutes before we could get it out.

My favorite spot in my home: The basement—there is an open space I can use to practice gymnastics.

My proudest day: That was the day I did a cartwheel off a beam into a foam pit. I was the only one in my whole class who could do it!



In 20 years, I'll be a first-grade teacher.

Introduce Yourself!

To find out how to be a featured reader, go to americangirl.com/playmagazine

Illustrations: Tracey Wood

AG Art Gallery

Think pink this Valentine's Day.

Help us fill our gallery!
Send color copies of your
original artwork or
photos to the address
on page 7. Sorry, we
can't return entries.



Avni I.
Age 10, California



Whitney H.
Age 12, Ohio



Sharti C.
Age 9, Arizona



Jenna W.
Age 14, South Dakota



Heather K.
Age 11, Wisconsin

What Does Your Heart Say?

Take our quiz to find out which candy heart best matches your personality.

1. If you were a stuffed animal, you'd be a ...

- a. cuddly St. Bernard.
- b. wise, elegant owl.
- c. silly, sparkly unicorn.



3. You make a coupon for your mom for Valentine's Day. It's good for ...

- a. one excellent back rub, plus a week of vacuuming.
- b. one afternoon of help cleaning out the basement.
- c. one laugh-out-loud poem written by you.

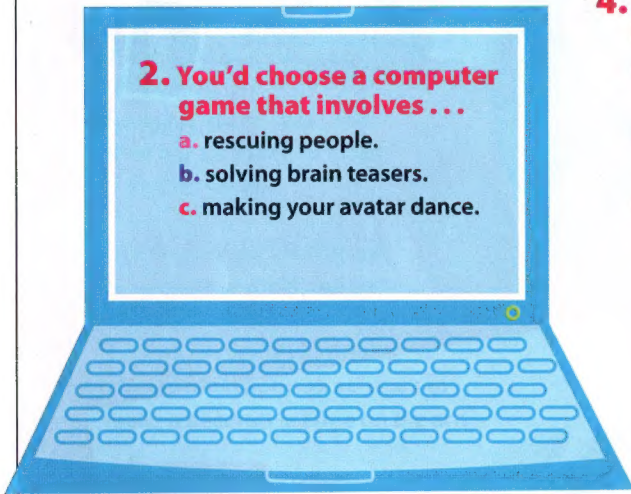
5. It's a random Saturday afternoon. You'd most likely be found ...

- a. checking online for pet-training tips.
- b. rearranging the posters in your room.
- c. playing a goofy game with your sibling.



2. You'd choose a computer game that involves ...

- a. rescuing people.
- b. solving brain teasers.
- c. making your avatar dance.



4. Your favorite part of having company over is ...

- a. setting the table—with a centerpiece and everything.
- b. arranging the living room so that everyone has a place to sit.
- c. opening the door when people arrive.



Answers

Mostly a's



Supportive
Understanding
Sweet

Mostly b's



Loyal
Responsible
Brainy

Mostly c's



Fun
Friendly
Funny

True Story

When they learned that Alaska had no official state dog, kids at Paige's school decided to change that.



Dear American Girl,

In Alaska, we have state symbols such as the moose and our blue flag with eight gold stars. When I was in kindergarten, my Grandma Shirley visited from North Carolina and taught my class about her state, including its official state dog. I asked my teacher about our state dog. Turns out, we didn't have one. Dogs are a big part of life in Alaska. My whole class agreed—we needed a state dog!

Our teacher got older classes involved to help research dogs in Alaskan history. We chose the Alaskan Malamute, a smart, beautiful, hard-working breed that has helped people in our state for hundreds of years to pull sleds through snow and ice.

Next, we wrote a letter to a state lawmaker. She liked our idea. With her help, we worked on convincing other lawmakers. It took three years! When the bill finally passed, the governor signed the bill into law at our school. Afterward, we all did a happy dance. I was so proud of myself, my friends, and my school for seeing the project through.

Sincerely,

Paige H.
Age 11, Alaska



An Alaskan
Malamute—
hi, puppy!

Creative Corner Sweet Heart



Cut out card. Flip over for directions.



Answer these questions, and then turn the page to see how your answers compare to those of other AG readers.

What's the best part of Valentine's Day?

- * yummy chocolate
- * big hugs
- * sweet valentines
- * cute plush animals

What kind of kitten would you adopt?

- * Persian
- * calico
- * Siamese
- * tabby



Sweet Heart

Here's a fun way to use up leftover candy canes. Spread **frosting** on a **sugar cookie**. Unwrap two **mini candy canes**, and arrange them in a heart shape on top of the cookie. We ♥ it!



AG Poll

What girls told us at
american^{girl}magazine.com

The best part of Valentine's Day is

47%
cute plush animals

26%
yummy chocolate

17%
sweet valentines

10%
big hugs

The kitten girls would adopt is

53%
tabby

22%
calico

14%
Siamese

11%
Persian

To answer our weekly poll question,
go to americangirl.com/playmagazine

Reader Recipe

Chocolate-Covered Popcorn

Pour plain popped popcorn (no butter flavor!) into a freezer-safe bowl. Squirt **chocolate syrup** on top of the popcorn, and place bowl in the freezer until the chocolate hardens. Eat your treat with a spoon if you can't wait for it to freeze!

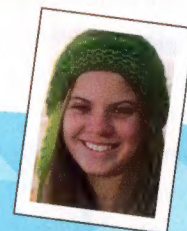
Send your yummy—and easy—
recipes to the address on page 7.



Gracie M.
Age 11, Colorado



Shining Star



Bay W. likes to play with her dog, Milo, or ride horses—that is, when she's not making chocolate. The 13-year-old California girl and six other girls run their own chocolate company. The company was created in 2005, when the girls started making chocolates for Christmas. Bay, at age seven, was the youngest. "We started with our parents helping the whole time," Bay says. But the girls now run the company themselves, buying all-natural ingredients, testing out new flavors, and making chocolate bars once a month in a commercial bakery.

The girls have sold thousands of chocolate bars online and at local businesses, but they aren't a penny richer. They donate all profits—\$4,000, so far—to charities that help everything from women and children to the environment to animals. Bay's favorite group helps wolves. Chocolate, charity, friends, and fun—it sounds pretty sweet. "It's not easy, but it's worth it," Bay says. "And it's really fun."

How do you shine?

Tell us what activities you do to
make your world a better place.
Send your letter to the
address on page 7.



Puppy Love

Show your dog that you care with a fuzzy collar cover.

1. Use **scissors** to trim a piece of **fleece** to cover your pet's **collar**. Leave room so that the buckle and holes still show.



2. Fold fleece around collar. Trim edges so that the cover is wide enough to slip off the collar easily. Attach long edges with **craft glue**. Let dry.



* Be sure to remove the fleece if it starts to fray or come loose!

Sweet Stumpers

Boggle your friends' minds with these tricky riddles.

1. How do you spell "candy" with only two letters?
2. Shailene, Helena, and Elle order coffee ice cream. Alexis, Carina, and Rae order chocolate ice cream. Would Elizabeth choose coffee ice cream or chocolate ice cream?

Answers

1. C and Y. Get it?
2. Elizabeth would get coffee ice cream. The letter E appears twice in her name, as it does in the names of the others who chose coffee flavor.



Write to Us

Be sure to include your

- * First and last name
- * Address and phone number
- * Birth date, including year
- * School photo or portrait
- * Parent signature

Send us a cool envelope! Print our address neatly on the front and your return address on the back.

We can't print every letter, but we read everything you send to us. Hope to hear from you soon! ★



Envelope art by
Maggie B.
Age 10, Maine



Cute Cupcakes

These girls sent us cupcake drawings that looked so sweet, we turned them into real-life treats!



Pup-Cake



Kaela L.
Age 13, New Jersey



Sour Power



Victoria M.
Age 11, Minnesota

Quack Snack



Shelby S.
Age 12, Mississippi



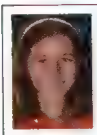
Frosted Feathers



HOLLY G.
Age 12, New Jersey



Sugar Scoops



Madeleine M.
Age 11, California



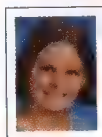
Frozen Food



Sophie M.
Age 8, Maryland



Sweet Bees



Cara S.
Age 14, Tennessee



Gnome-Made Treat



Tealey I.
Age 10, Pennsylvania



New Contest: Summer Sippers

Send us your best recipes for cold, refreshing summer drinks. Have you created a unique fruit smoothie that your friends love? What do you add to lemonade to make it taste even better? Tell us which drinks make you say *Ahhh* on a hot day. Send your summer drink recipe to the address on page 7, along with your first and last name, address, school or portrait-style photo, and birth date. Postmark deadline: February 10, 2012. Winners will appear in the July/August 2012 issue. Sorry—we can't return entries. ★

You Said It! ❄️

On my dream snow day, I would...



ski in the mountains with all of my friends. Afterward, we'd go in the lodge to sit by a fire, **drink hot cocoa**, and tell ghost stories.



Olivia E.
Age 11, New Jersey

take my **Chihuahua**, Bella, for a little walk in the snow. It would be fun to watch her prance around and make tiny paw prints.



Emily E.
Age 10, Washington

catch lots of fresh snowflakes on my tongue!



Michelle K.
Age 8, Washington

text all of my pals to come over for a **gigantic** snowball fight.



Cameron H.
Age 12, New Jersey



School's closed! The first thing you'd do is...

Build a
snow fort

Have a
snowball
fight

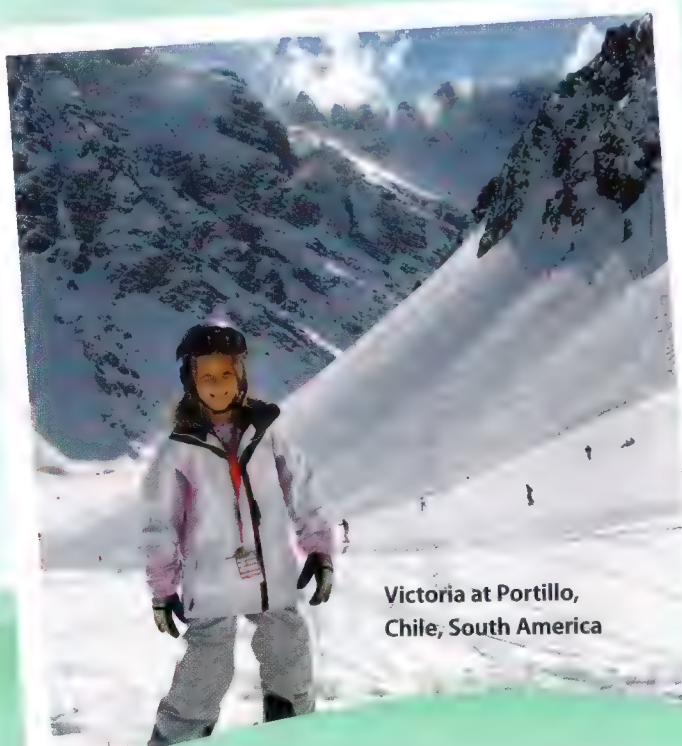
Go
sledding

Drink hot
chocolate

Sit next
to a fire

Frosty Fact

In 2008, Victoria W. became the youngest person to ski on all seven continents. She started in Switzerland when she was 9 and finished in Colorado when she was 10!



Victoria at Portillo,
Chile, South America

Next Question!

Tell us your funniest, **most embarrassing** summer story! Make us giggle with your sticky summer situations, from bursting into laughter at the beach to cracking up at camp.



Send your answer to the address on page 7, along with your first and last name, address, school or portrait-style photo, and birth date. Postmark deadline: February 10, 2012. Some answers will appear in the July/August 2012 issue.

Friendly Competition

by Apryl Lundsten

Get a pal and take these tricky tests made for two!

Magazine Rack

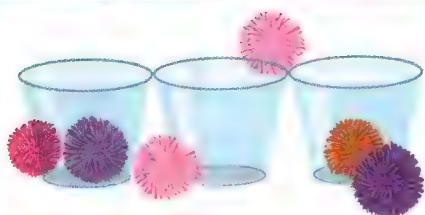
Pile **stacks of magazines** on opposite sides of a room. On "Go!" you and an opponent place a single magazine on your head, cross the room, bend down and add another magazine to your head, return, add another, and so on until all your magazines fall off. You can't straighten the stack, but you can open the magazine to spread it over your head. Who added the most magazines to her head rack?



Haiku View

A haiku is a Japanese form of poetry with 3 lines. The first line has 5 syllables, the second line has 7 syllables, and the third line has 5 syllables. For this poetic challenge, you have 1 minute to create a haiku about each of the topics shown below. If you both finish the poems, ask an impartial judge to choose the one that best fits each topic. The best 2 out of 3 wins.

- * Something in nature
- * A sport or hobby
- * A friend



Tic-Tac-Throw

Line up **9 clear plastic cups** in 3 rows so that the cups are touching. You and your opponent each take 3 giant steps back from your own side of the cups and mark the spot on the floor with **masking tape**. Each player chooses a different color of **pom-poms**. On "Go!" take turns tossing a pom-pom into any cup. The first player to get 3 pom-poms in a line in any direction wins.

Detective Dig

Fill a **brown paper bag** with **various objects** from the house or yard. Without looking, your opponent sticks her hand into the bag to feel the objects and then writes down as many as she can identify in 1 minute. The player who guesses the most wins.

Identical Twins

Separate **5 pairs of socks**, slip them inside a **pillowcase**, and mix them up. On "Go!" you have 1 minute to correctly mate all the socks without looking. Drop the bag when you're done or if time runs out. Check your pairs, and count the sock mates correctly paired. Now switch players. Whoever has the most sock pairs wins.



Distant Decision

Give an opponent a **ball of yarn** and keep one for yourself. Point out an object across the room or yard, such as a chair or a basketball. Using **scissors**, each of you cuts a piece of yarn to the size that you think will fit perfectly around that object. Now measure. The one closest to being correct keeps both pieces of yarn. Now try another object. The player with the most yarn after 5 tries wins.



Games that are fun for one, tricky for two, or great for groups can be found in *Take the Challenge!* ★



Grace

Mary Claire

Four Times the Love

Emily

Anna

What it's really like to be an identical quadruplet

Grace, Emily, Mary Claire, and Anna M. are 11-year-old identical sisters. They have the same birthday, the same hair, the same giggles, and even freckles in the same places on their faces. They all love to have fun, but each girl likes to be herself, too. These girls tell *American Girl* about what life is like when you live with three other people who look just like you.

AG: What's it like to have three identical sisters?

Mary Claire: People think we're triplets or two sets of twins. We're not! We're four identical sisters born at the same time.

AG: How are you alike?

Emily: We're alike in many ways. We all have the same hairstyle and eye color, and most of us wear the same size shoes. We are all about the same height, except for Grace, who is a little bit taller.

Grace: We all like to do the same things, like swimming and bike riding.

Mary Claire: Grace and I look alike, and Emily and Anna look very, very alike. I'm the shortest but not the youngest. Grace is oldest by 30 seconds. Then Emily is 30 seconds older than me. Anna is the youngest by another 30 seconds.

AG: How are you different from one another?

Emily: I think all of my sisters' faces are different.

Grace: The backs of our heads are definitely different. Emily's head is down all the time, and Anna holds her head really high. People have a hard time telling us apart, but we always dress differently. I like to wear sporty clothes—loose and comfortable in colors like orange and black.

Anna: Grace usually wears different types of clothes than the rest of us. I like electric green clothes.

Mary Claire: Grace has more curls than the rest of us. Emily is the quiet one. I love to read the most. They call me a bookworm. As for what we like to wear,

I like blue and green clothes and stuff that's polka dotted.

AG: Speaking of clothes, do you do your own laundry?

All: No!

Emily: We each have our own laundry basket for dirty clothes. Mama washes it all, then she gives it back to us to separate, fold, and put away.

AG: At school, are you in the same class?

Emily: In the past, we had always done two and two in the same classes. It's nice to have a sister in class with you. It can be comforting. But sometimes having a sister around can be annoying. My sisters are nice, but not always!

AG: Your family has a horse named

Kidd. What's it like for four girls to share one horse?

Grace: Kidd gets lots of love. I like riding him because he's really gentle and he listens to me and connects with me. I like having my sisters around when I'm riding. Sometimes one of them helps from the ground while I'm riding. I'm usually the one who wants to go to the barn.

Anna: I love having a horse. I like to ride him and cuddle with him. Grace and I had fun the other day when we both got on at the same time.

Emily: I'm not the sharing type. Sometimes I do let my sisters help me get Kidd ready to ride, but usually I like to do it all by myself.



Playing video games at home

AG: What's the hardest part of having three identical sisters?

Mary Claire: I don't like sharing all the time. And I do like sneaking up on my sisters and scaring them, but it's not fun when they do it to me. Sometimes we fight over the smallest things on earth, like whose foot is bigger. I am the smallest in the house, so at least I can stay out of that argument.

AG: How do you celebrate birthdays?

Grace: Birthdays are a little chaotic. Last year we had a big sleepover with 16 girls, including us. It was really hectic. We painted our nails and made bath salts. Our neighbor made us each our own birthday cake. Mine was a pink cake with a piano on it and roses. I loved it.

Anna: I was so excited to have my friends over. We each invited three. It was fun to talk with them and go to

sleep with them privately in my room. My cake had horses on it and it was green, my favorite color.

Mary Claire: My cake was blue with lions on it.

Emily: I loved the cakes that we got. Our neighbor who made them is like our second grandma. My cake had soccer players on it. Having my friends over was really awesome. I loved making the bath salts. They smelled good.

AG: What is the best part of having three identical sisters?

Anna: I love always having someone to play with. And it's nice to have a backup for homework. Grace was in my class last year, and I could always count on her.

Emily: I always have someone to talk to. If I'm really mad, I can let it out. There is always someone to listen.

Grace: Whatever I feel like doing—jumping on the trampoline, riding my bike, visiting our neighbor's kittens, or playing a video game—there's always somebody to do it with. Sometimes a sister can criticize too much. But on the other hand, last year it was fun to have Anna in my class. I got the whopper award from the teacher for telling funny stories about her.

Mary Claire: I don't like sleeping alone, so I always have someone to fall asleep with in my room. We have always done two and two, like at school. And like Anna said, it's nice to have a backup. If I don't have a friend, I always have a sister.



Emily and Mary Claire
share a room ...



... and so do Anna
and Grace.



In a house with four
sisters, many things
come in fours, including
shoes and backpacks.

Quad Confidential

How the sisters describe one another



Mary Claire

Emily says: "Mary Claire makes good animal noises."

Anna says: "Mary Claire is very smart and obsessed with cats."

Grace says: "Mary Claire is very sweet but has a dark side."



Grace

Anna says: "Grace is very outgoing, and she likes hockey."

Emily says: "Grace is funny and sweet and someone I can cuddle with when I'm sad."

Mary Claire says: "Grace is outgoing and likes to correct people."



Anna

Emily says: "Anna is sweet and very protective of her stuffed animals."

Grace says: "Anna is a teaver."

Mary Claire says: "Anna likes to tease, but she can be very, very nice."



Emily

Anna says: "Emily is a very sweet, funny person and is really good at guitar."

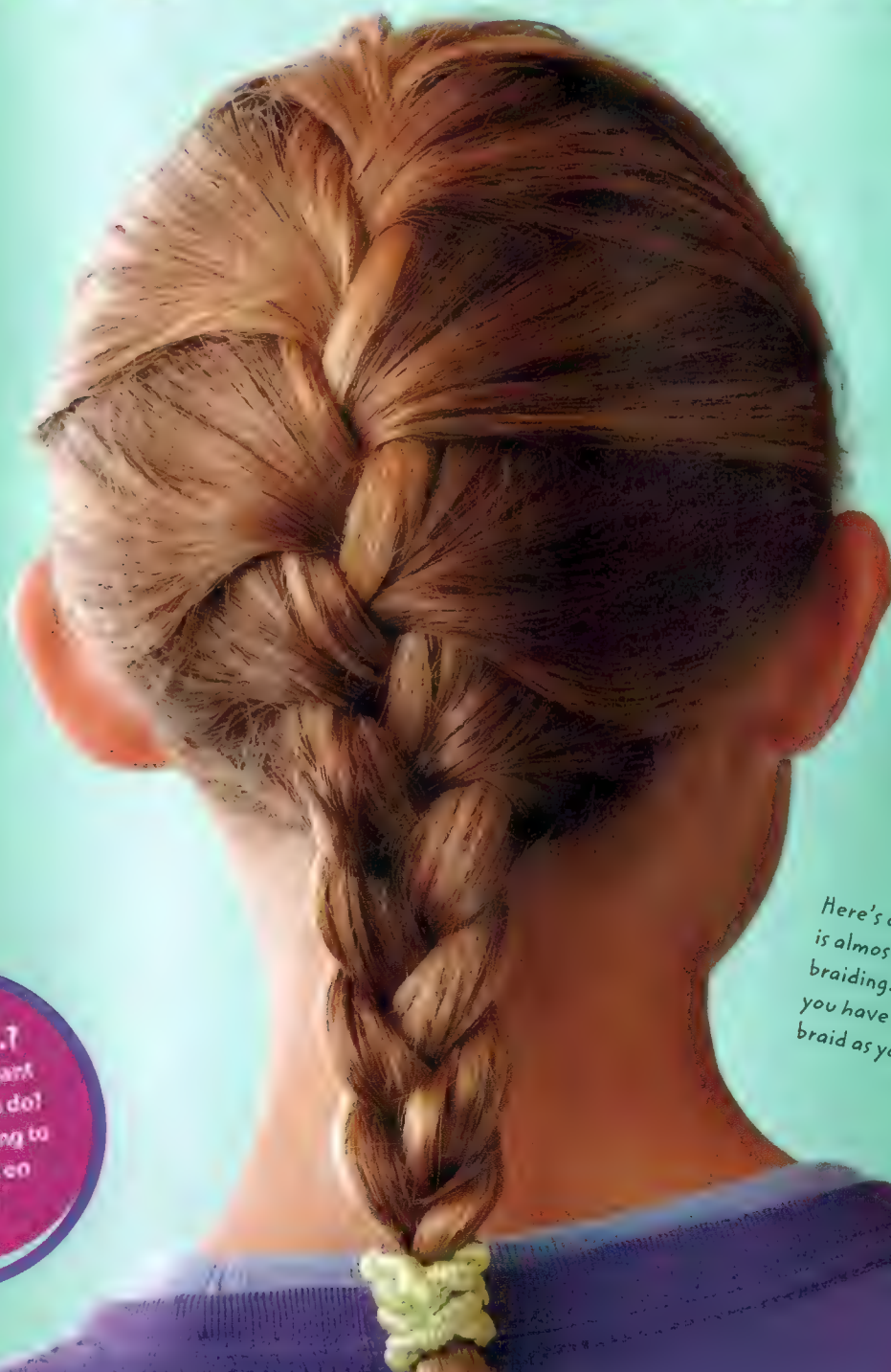
Grace says: "Emily is a prankster."

Mary Claire says: "Emily is a real prankster. She likes to talk about unicorns." →

Here's How

NEW
Department!

Learn to French Braid



Here's a secret: French braiding is almost exactly like regular braiding. The difference is that you have to add hair to the braid as you go.

How Do I...?

What do you want to learn how to do? Tell us by writing to the address on page 7.

Try out this step-by-step on a friend,
and soon you'll be a braiding boss!



1. Brush out a friend's hair. Then pick up a bundle of hair where you want the braid to start. Separate the bundle into three equal sections.



2. Cross the right section over the middle. (The right becomes the new middle section.) Then cross the left section over the new middle section. (The left section becomes the new middle section.)



3. Tighten the braid by gently pulling the sections away from one another.



4. Now add more hair to the right section before you keep braiding. Lift a bit of hair from the hairline on the right side (A), and add it to the right section (B). Then braid your new right section over the middle section.



5. Lift a small section of hair from the hairline on the left (A), and add it to the left section (B). Then braid.



6. Continue, going back and forth to the right and left, tightening as you go.



7. End the braid at the nape of the neck, or do a traditional braid with the remaining hair. At the spot where you want the braid to end, tie off with an elastic.



8. Smooth out any lumps on the sides of the head by gently combing toward the braid. Done!

Try
these,
too:

Do half a French braid before tying off the braid into a ponytail.



Part the hair down the middle and do one braid on each side.

Do a braid around one ear and braid over the top of the head like a headband. Tie off the braid behind the other ear.



Which Treat Are You?

by Aubre Andrus

You are what you treat! Take this quiz to find out what your treat tastes tell about your personality.



1. At the ice cream shop, you'll find me...

- a. ordering whatever flavor my friend orders.
- b. swirling together my favorite flavors for a unique creation.
- c. talking with chocolate sauce all over my face.
- d. ordering the same flavor every time.

2. My favorite kind of candy is...

- a. sweet chocolate bunnies.



- b. unusual mystery-flavored suckers.



- c. sour gummy worms.



- d. traditional candy bars.



3. The best part about baking cupcakes is...

- a. sharing them with friends.
- b. decorating them with frosting.
- c. eating them at a party.
- d. smelling that just-baked aroma.



4. My birthday cake is...

- a. something simple that I know all my guests will like.
- b. different every year.



- c. colorful, bright, and bold.
- d. homemade from my favorite cake recipe.



5. On Valentine's Day, I...

- a. pass out valentines to my entire class.
- b. make handmade valentines for my whole family—even the dog!
- c. wear my silliest accessories—heart-shaped sunglasses and a light-up headband!
- d. send a few cards and candy to my best friends.

6. If my life were a milkshake, it would be...

- a. mixed with lots of love and happiness.
- b. made with a dash of creativity and a pinch of imagination.
- c. topped with fun and laughter.
- d. blended to a simple and sweet perfection.



7. I take my hot chocolate...

- a. just as it is—hot!
- b. with a candy cane for a peppermint twist.
- c. with a swirl of whipped cream on top.
- d. out of my special holiday mug I've had for years.



8. During a hot summer day, I love to...

- a. pass out ice pops to my family.
- b. make my own cool creations.
- c. chase the ice cream truck with my friends.
- d. chill inside with a cold glass of lemonade.



9. One day I dream of...

- a. opening a doughnut shop my friends and family will love.
- b. becoming an ice cream taste-tester.
- c. baking the world's biggest birthday cake—for me and all my friends!
- d. becoming daring enough to try a crazy flavor like pizza cupcakes or broccoli ice cream.



10. When I make a gingerbread house, I always...

- a. let my siblings help.
- b. sketch a drawing of it first.
- c. eat most of the candy before I finish the house. Oops!
- d. re-create the picture on the box.



Answers

If you picked mostly a's...

You're as soft and sweet as a **sugar cookie!**

Because you're an easygoing girl who thinks of others first, you get along with everyone. Just remember you don't always have to go with the flow—it's OK to have your own ideas and share them with others.



If you picked mostly b's...

You're filled with interesting layers like a **yogurt parfait!**

That makes you a well-rounded girl when it comes to friends, school, and family. You also aren't afraid to try new things and be creative, which is what your friends love most about you.



If you picked mostly c's...

Just like an **ice cream sundae,**

you're the life of the party! Your friends turn to you when they need a little laugh, and you always know how to put a smile on their faces. When it comes to being social and silly, you're an expert—it's what makes you YOU!



If you picked mostly d's...

Just like a **peanut-butter cup,**

you have a surprise inside! It may take a little time to break out of your shell, but inside you have a lot of great things to share. Don't be afraid to try something new or speak your mind—you might even surprise yourself! ★



Craft 

SILLY VALENTINES



Send a goofy saying in a felt fortune cookie!

YOU WILL NEED

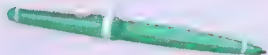
- * Round lid or stencil (3–4 inch diameter)



- * Felt



- * Pen



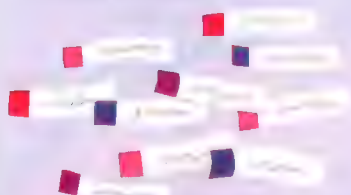
- * Scissors



- * Double-stick tape



- * Paper fortunes



1. Lay the round lid on a piece of felt, and trace around it to make a circle shape. Cut out the felt circle. Attach a small piece of double-stick tape to one edge of the circle.



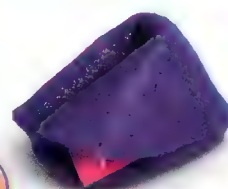
2. Place two fingers in the middle of the circle so that the tape is to the left of your fingers. Use your free hand to fold the circle around your fingers. Press the edges together at the top.



3. Remove your fingers from the felt tube and place a paper fortune inside. (Visit americangirl.com/playmagazine for funny fortunes to print and share, or make your own.)



4. Fold the felt tube in half the opposite way so that the ends meet. Use another piece of double-stick tape to attach the ends together. Make a batch of valentines to share with your friends! ★



To make a new friend, wear mismatched socks on Friday.

©/TM 2012 American Girl



There's no such thing as too many monkeys.

©/TM 2012 American Girl



The next time it rains, eat your lunch alphabetically.

©/TM 2012 American Girl



If a mermaid winks when you take her picture, that's good luck.

©/TM 2012 American Girl



If the unicorn that you see tomorrow is wearing a hat, that's bad luck.

©/TM 2012 American Girl

Flurry of Fun

Melt a boredom blizzard with these ten activities!

1.

Arrr! Barbeque

Even though it's winter, that doesn't mean that your family can't celebrate a summer holiday, such as Independence Day. Eat warm-weather foods such as hot dogs, potato salad, watermelon, and ice pops. Spread out a blanket in the living room and have an indoor picnic together. Wear red, white, and blue clothes, too.



2.

Chill Out

Want to relax with a book you haven't read before? Ask your parents what their favorite books were when they were your age. Go to the library to get the books, or see if your parents still have their original copies.

4.

Cool Jewels

Have a jewelry swap with friends. With a parent's permission, gather pieces of jewelry you don't wear very much, and ask your friends to do the same. It will be fun to add lots of "new" jewelry to your collections.



3.

Frozen Forecast

With a friend, see who can predict the weather for the next day. Each of you say what she thinks the "high" temperature will be or how many inches of rain or snow you might get. Whoever makes the closest guess wins a sweet treat or gets to choose the movie at a sleepover.





5.

Winter Wonderland

Bring the winter weather inside and have a below-zero bash with buddies or siblings. Watch a movie with a snowy setting, wear cozy sweaters, and set out bowls of powdered-sugar-covered doughnut holes for the snowballs. Don't forget the hot cocoa!



6.

Starry Skies

Ask a parent to go outside with you at night to look at the stars. Since the air is very cold and clear in the winter, it's easier to see things in the night sky such as constellations and shooting stars. Just be sure to bundle up!



7.

Polar Flair

Pile on outdoor gear and have a fashion show in the snow with friends. Ask your buds to wear fun, flashy snow clothes—sweaters, coats, hats, snow pants, and anything else you can think of. Show off your layers on a snowy runway in your yard, and ask family members to be the audience. Be sure to have someone take pictures of your "cool" outfits.

8.

Color Pops

Ask a parent if you can put colorful lawn ornaments, such as pink flamingos or cute gnomes, in your yard. They're sure to brighten up the wintry scene outside.



9.

Chilly Challenge

Have a snow-sculpting competition with friends or family. Make animals, buildings, or people out of snow, and ask someone to judge. The winner gets a prize!

10.

Snowy Snapshots

Make a wintry photo album to look at later, when it's hot outside. Take pictures of your family going for a winter walk, or ask an adult to snap photos of you and your friends having a blast in the snow. On a sizzling summer day, pull out the album for frosty memories. ★




Color Blast

Brighten a winter day with a colorific party!



Dot-to-Dot Decor

 Create wall-to-wall color with pom-pom garlands! First ask an adult to help you thread a needle with a long piece of embroidery floss. Tape the loose end of the thread to a covered work surface. String pom-poms on the thread by carefully pushing the needle into the pom-pom's center and pulling it through. Fill the garland with as many pom-poms as you'd like. Ask an adult to help you hang the garlands.

Invitation

Make a quick and colorful invite! First, attach a removable sticker or removable mailing label to the front of a blank greeting card. Using a pencil eraser and multicolored ink pads, stamp colorful dots across the front of the card. Let dry. Peel off the removable label. Write your party message in the blank space that's left. Decorate the envelope too!



Brilliant Fashion

Show your brights! Ask guests to wear their most colorful clothing to the party. When the party begins, pass out colorful accessories such as hair clips, bracelets, and socks. Let each guest choose something to wear during the party and take home afterward.

Hair Color

Add happy hues to your hair with a vivid wrap. Try this on a friend; then switch.


1. Braid a small section of hair and fasten a hair elastic at the end.
2. Cut a piece of embroidery floss that's 6 times as long as the braid.
3. Tie the floss in a knot around the top of the braid so you have one very long end and one very short end.
4. Holding the short end of the floss against the braid, tightly wrap the long piece around the braid. Make sure that the braid is completely covered.
5. When you reach the end of the braid, tuck the floss under the hair elastic to secure. Carefully trim the excess floss.
Note: When it's time to remove the hair wrap, ask an adult to carefully unwind it from your hair.


Color-Pop Art

 Turn a regular photo into a work of art! Before the party, ask each guest to give you a photo of herself. Ask an adult to help you make four black-and-white photocopies of each photo. At the party, return the photo and copies to each girl. Use colored pencils to color in the photocopies using the craziest combos you can think of. When everyone's finished, mount the photocopies on poster board for guests to take home.



Paintbox Pizza

 Eat all the colors of the rainbow.

 You will need:

- * 2 packages crescent-roll dough
- * 8 ounces cream cheese
- * 8 ounces sour cream
- * 4 tablespoons ranch dressing mix
- * Fresh vegetables

For the pizza's base:

1. Unroll both tubes of crescent roll dough on a greased cookie sheet. Pinch them together to make one large rectangle. Ask an adult to bake in a preheated 375-degree oven for 10–15 minutes. Let cool completely.
2. In a medium bowl, mix together the cream cheese, sour cream, and ranch dressing mix. Spread the cream cheese mixture onto the cooled crust.
3. To make a rainbow, top the pizza with one thing from each category:

Red: tomatoes, red peppers

Orange: cheddar cheese, carrots

Yellow: yellow peppers, yellow squash


Green: cucumbers, broccoli

Blue/violet: red onion, red cabbage

4. Ask an adult to cut the pizza into long, thin slices so that each piece is a mini rainbow.




Spotted Smoothies

 Add a fun design to a simple smoothie! For the spots: Ask an adult to use clean kitchen scissors to cut off the bottom of a gumdrop. Press the sticky side of the gumdrop to the inside of a drinking glass. Repeat with more gumdrops to make stripes or a design. For the smoothie: Combine 1 cup apple juice, ½ cup vanilla frozen yogurt, and a banana in the blender. Ask an adult to blend well. Pour into the glasses.



Rainbow Bites

 These mini cupcakes burst with color.

You will need:


- * 1 box white cake mix
- * Food coloring
- * White frosting
- * Candy sprinkles

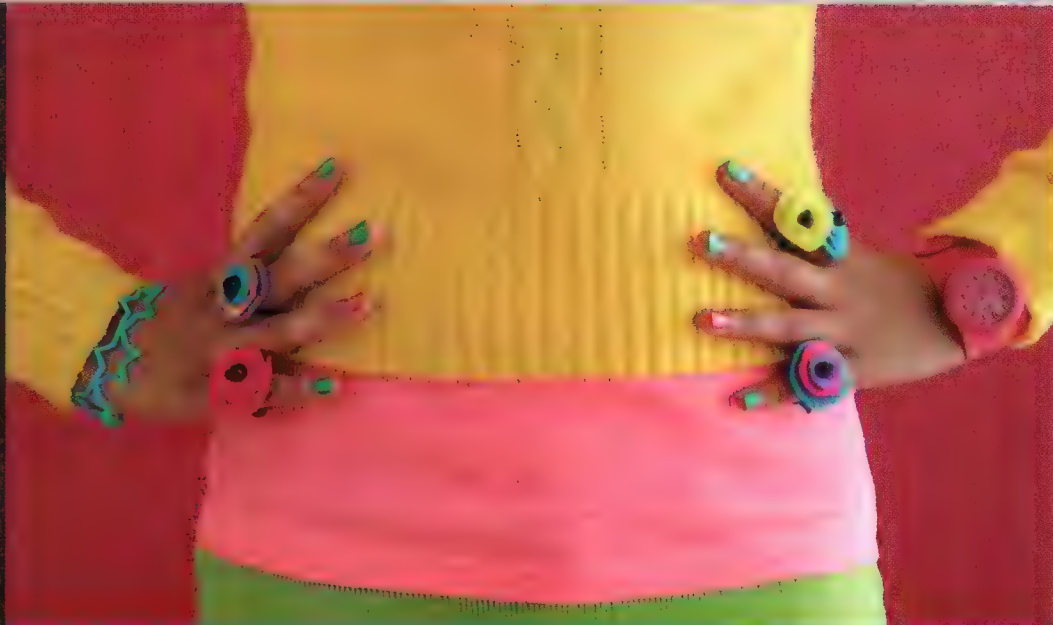
Directions:

1. Ask an adult to help you follow the directions on the cake mix box to make one batch of cake batter. Divide the batter into four bowls.
2. Add 10 drops of food coloring to each bowl, using a different color for each one. Stir each bowl until the food coloring is blended in.
3. Place mini-cupcake liners in a mini-cupcake tin. Starting with one color, use a spoon to scoop a little batter into each cupcake liner. Repeat with each color.
4. Ask an adult to bake the cupcakes in a preheated 350-degree oven for 8–10 minutes. Let cool completely.
5. Once cool, remove the cupcakes from the pan. Put a small dollop of white frosting in the center of each cupcake. Finish with sprinkles.



Radiant Rings

 Make a craft you can wear. First, cut out three felt circles, each one a little smaller than the last. (It's OK if the circles are not perfectly round.) Ask an adult to help you snip a small hole in the center of each circle. Next, cut a hair elastic so that it's one straight cord. Starting with the largest one, thread the elastic cord through each circle. Then thread a large bead onto the cord. Lastly, thread the cord back down through the circles. Ask an adult to help you tie the two ends around your finger and trim excess cord.



Multicolor Memory

Challenge your friends to a color memory game. Before the party, place 8-10 objects on a tray. Each item should be a different color. (Don't let your guests see the tray beforehand.) When it's time to play, bring out the tray and let everyone look at it for 15 seconds. Then put the tray away. Next, give each guest a sheet of paper with the colors of the objects listed on it. Guests have 30 seconds to write down the name of the item that goes with each color. Whoever remembers the most items in 30 seconds wins!



Neon Sweets

Send each guest home with a rainbow in a jar! Start with a small, clean jar. Layer neon-colored candy inside, one color at a time. Once the jar is filled to the top, tighten the lid. Finish with a brightly colored ribbon and name tag. ★





The class valentines are gone, and the class trip is in danger! Can Pippa solve the case?

First Period



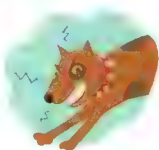
I tried to hustle toward Room 304 as the second bell rang, but my brand-new pink-glitter, polka-dot backpack was so heavy on my left shoulder that I just couldn't move any faster.

I was the fifth-grade Hunchback of Notre Dame. And I was late *again*.

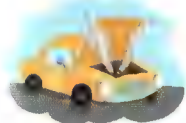
Ms. Lodestar, my teacher at Finley Elementary School, was going to have a full-on fit.

I imagined Ms. Lodestar's face as I arrived puffing and huffing. Would she ban me from recess or make me alphabetize the class library again? Quickly, I plotted a lame excuse.

This strange dog bit me!





My aunt's car stalled on the highway!



I got sick this morning because I ate too many Yummy-Os!




In the end, of course, I knew I had to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth:

I was late because I couldn't decide which shoes went better with my favorite white puffy vest—orange rhinestone sneakers  or sparkly purple flats. 

It felt better to admit that out loud. Unfortunately, feelings of relief evaporated when I reached our classroom door. The weight of my heavy backpack tipped me over—and the bag's zipper ripped with a loud *zzzzrrrip*.

Everything flew out at once.

My science and math textbooks landed with a thud, followed by my beat-up copy of *Nancy Drew: The Secret of the Old Clock*; a half-eaten chocolate-chip muffin;  five chewed-on pencils; stretchy hair bands; and the brush I thought I'd lost last week. Walter, my lucky yellow rubber frog, tumbled

out last. Only, he wasn't so lucky today.



The classroom door flew open. Ms. Lodestar loomed over me, arms crossed.

"Well, Pippa," she said. "You've decided to join us after all?"

I scrambled to cram the mess back into my bag. I could feel Ms. Lodestar's laser-beam stare. Would steam start to puff out of her ears like in cartoons? I braced myself for some shouting.

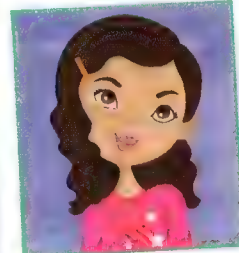
But then something weird happened. Weird with a capital "W." Ms. Lodestar didn't raise her voice—not one decibel. In fact, she extended her hand to help me up.

"Just go in and take your seat, OK?" Ms. Lodestar said quietly. "We have a disappointing situation, and I need everyone's help."

I quickly went inside and slid into the seat behind my BFF, Alex.

"What is going on?" I asked.

"Here's what happened," Alex whispered, pointing to the front of the room. "A minute after the first bell, Ms. Lodestar discovered *that*."



Alex

I gasped when I saw what Alex was pointing to. Just up front, under the classroom SMART Board, the enormous carton decorated with pink and purple hearts on its sides and labeled HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY! sat open and empty.

Someone had swiped all the valentines from the valentine box!



At the start of school, our class had decided to do a classroom valentine swap one last time before we went into middle school. Some kids thought it was dumb or even babyish, but a lot of us (OK, the *girls*) loved the idea of making red construction-paper valentines in school this one last time. We'd been stuffing our valentine box for days!



Someone had swiped all the valentines from the valentine box!

Alex dared me to make a card for this kid named Tommy, whom I sort of like, and I made him a card in the shape of a hand with little hearts on the fingertips and the words "You touch my heart" written on top. He'll probably think Eloise Elias sent it. She's the best artist and writer in our class and lets everyone know it. So my secret's safe.

"If we don't find out who stole the cards," Alex went on, "Ms. Lodestar says we can't go on our field trip to Science City next month."

"What!" I gasped.

Science Galaxy is a cool new museum on the other side of town. Our fifth-grade class held three different bake-sale fundraisers so far this year to pay for the field trip.

"When I find out who the valentine bandit is, I'm giving that dude wedgies

for a year," Alex said. "I'm *heartsick* over this."

I groaned at her bad pun and socked her in the shoulder. "This is no time for jokes, Alex. This is important!"

We needed a serious plan to fix things. Then it hit me.

"I, Pippa Walsh, know how I can ID our valentine bandit, save the class trip, and get back all the valentines before the end of the school day."

"Oh really?" Alex giggled. "Good luck with *that*."

"Maybe Ms. Lodestar will give me extra credit for solving a mystery," I added.

Ms. Lodestar must have heard us talking.

"Students!" she cried, turning around toward us. "Open your science books to chapter five *now*."

Second Period



The chapter-five heading was "Parts of a Cell."

I scanned the vocabulary list and sighed. I have trouble remembering science terms, and there were some doozies on this list: cytoplasm, chloroplast, vacuole. Those all sounded like heavy-metal bands. We couldn't talk, so Alex passed me a note.

Lk @ Nat

Nat was Nat Booth, naturally. He sat two rows away, messing with a paper clip. He was always messing with something. Nat's other class nickname was Rob, as in robber, because we all suspected he took stuff from our desks like a real thief. One time I saw a stash of at least fifty stolen eraser pencil toppers in the bottom of his backpack.

I scribbled back.

So U think Nat took the ♥s???

Alex mouthed just one word: "Duh."

I guess Nat could be a likely suspect. Maybe I needed to start making lists just like my hero, Nancy Drew, would do. I started writing on my notebook.

"Pippa!" Ms. Lodestar called out from the other



side of the room. "I hate to interrupt your writing back there, but I need you to come up here and label the parts of a cell."

Oh, dear.

No time for notes or lists. First, I had a date with cytoplasm, chloroplast, and vacuole.

And actually, it was a *blind* date, because I had no idea which was which or where *any* of them went on the diagram.

Third Period



My disappointing performance at the SMART Board inspired Ms. Lodestar to have *two* periods of science today. This meant that I had to postpone my valentine-bandit investigation for another forty-seven minutes.

Fourth Period



At the start of fourth period, Ms. Lodestar passed out grammar worksheets and told us to take out books for DEAR time. I was back to making detective notes. I had come up with a numbered list of three most-likely-to-be-bandits from our class.



I knew my first suspect was the most obvious choice. *Duh.* I'd seen Nat "borrow" pens and bookmarks from the class a few times, too.

But I also just had this feeling that Nat *didn't* steal the heart-and-flower cards. Did detectives on TV use gut feelings to guide their investigations? Sure they did!

I crossed Nat's name off the list.



Next on my list were Ray West and his twin sister, Riley. They were the class pranksters. One time Riley stuck chewing gum *inside* my binder. My social studies project smelled like Cinnamon even after I peeled off all the gum.

During class, I sidled up to them at the bookshelf to see if I could get them to confess. Ray was choosing a book. Riley was wasting time.

"It smells like up dog in here," Ray whispered to me.

I squinted at him. "What's 'up dog'?" I asked.

Ray giggled. "I don't know," he said. "What's up with you?"

Riley giggled more loudly, which made Ms. Lodestar glare at the three of us. "Get back to the books," she warned. "We've had enough trouble-making for one morning."

"That was *not* funny," I said to them both in a whisper.

"Yes, it was," Riley barked, and went back to her seat.

"It *was* pretty funny," Ray repeated, nudging me with his elbow.

"As funny as the stolen valentines?" I blurted. "Do you or your sister know anything about *those*?"

Ray circled his ear with one finger as if to say, "Cuckoo!" And then he got real quiet. "You know, I actually thought about stealing those cards," he confessed. I thought for a split-second that I had my bandit!

But then Ray admitted he wouldn't know where

to put the valentines even if he had taken them. "The cards couldn't all fit in one backpack," Ray said. "You'd need a giant duffel bag or something."

"Hey," a too-perky voice chimed in. "What are you talking about? You know, you're not supposed to be talking during DEAR time."

Eloise Elias, otherwise known as Miss Perfection and the girl whose teeth are straight and the girl who gets all As, was poking her perfect little nose into our conversation.

"Uh, we weren't talking to *you*, Elo-wheeze,"

Ray snarled, and walked away.

Eloise rolled her eyes at me. "Pippa, you're not supposed to be talking, *especially* after what happened this morning."

"Eloise," I asked carefully, "do you have any ideas about who

stole the valentines?"

"Me? Why are you asking me? Why should I know?" Eloise replied, flustered.

"You are the smartest kid in class," I said.

"I thought you of all people would know."

"Well," Eloise pursed her lips, "if you put it that way." She leaned into my ear. "I think Marnie DiGiulia had something to do with it."

Marnie? The new girl? I shot a casual look across the room. She'd been with us for only a few weeks. No one knew much except that she got good grades and had the reddest hair in the room. Today she was reading *Lassie* for DEAR, which was funny since my own book was *Doggy 911: Animal Adventures*. We had something in common.

Before I could get over to Marnie to ask a few questions, my stomach growled—loudly.

And no investigation can get in the way of lunch.



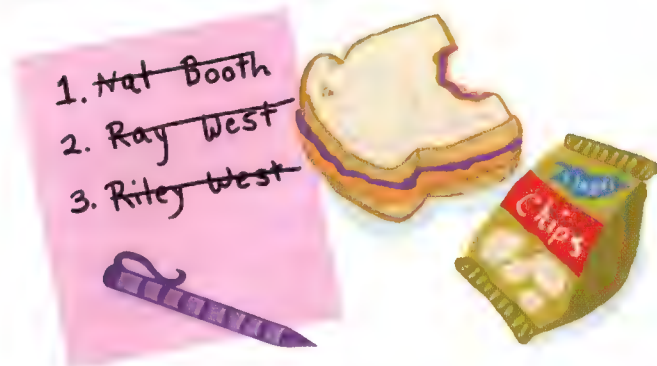
Fifth Period



I was not in the mood for sloppy joes with corn nibblets, so I opted for our sandwich bar. Mrs. O. the lunch lady made me a PB and J.

"How is your investigation going?" Alex asked as we sat down together at a lunch table.

"I have some leads," I admitted, taking a bite of my sandwich. "I made a list."



"Why is everyone's name crossed off the list?" Alex asked.

"Process of elimination. But I do have one new suspect," I said as I scribbled a new name onto the list.



"Yeah, the new girl does dress weird," Alex said. "But then again, so do you."

"Alex!" I said as I threw a potato chip at her.

"Food fight?" Alex teased, throwing a raisin at my lunch tray.

Laughing, I glanced over toward the table where Marnie was sitting. She was watching me and Alex. Staring.

Weird.

That was exactly what Eloise had said. I had to be

onto something. Maybe I was closer to solving this crime than I thought?

Sixth Period



The language arts assignment was to write a color poem. For a few minutes, I focused on my orange sneakers instead of missing valentines.

Orange like my personality

Orange as a round sun

Orange you wondering who stole the valentines?

I couldn't focus on poems at a time like this.

"Class!" Ms. Lodestar announced. "We have exactly two periods remaining in the day. If the responsible party or parties do not reveal their identities, I will cancel our class trip. Does our valentine bandit wish to come forward at this time?"

No one spoke up.

Tumbleweeds.

Marnie DiGiulia didn't flinch when Ms. Lodestar said all that stuff. If Marnie *was* the culprit, she was good at hiding her crime—and her feelings.

I had to investigate this further.


I had questions to ask!

But I only had one period left to do it.

Seventh Period



Final period of the day was actually a special, so we all left our classroom and walked down the hall to the music room. The teacher had us working on a special unit about the Beatles, so we each got sheet music for "Yellow Submarine."

Halfway through music, we took a break. I noticed Marnie staring right at me. She started to walk over. I got a grapefruit-sized  knot in my stomach.

"Excuse me. What are you looking at?" Marnie asked, tapping her foot.

"Oh," I stammered. "I just wanted to talk to you, but I don't really know you so . . ."

"You don't know me?" Marnie said. "We've been in class together for a whole month."

"I was just wondering if you knew anything . . . um . . ." I didn't know how to say it. "Did you steal the valentines from the valentine box?" I blurted.



Marnie looked shocked. “No!” she cried. “Why would you think I stole them? That is so uncool.”

I felt myself blush with embarrassment. I definitely felt uncool. My cheeks were hot.

“I am not a thief—unlike *some* people around here,” Marnie said.

“Who?” I asked.

Just then, there was a blast from the corner of the room. I nearly jumped out of my skin. Eloise was trying French horn.

“Why don’t you ask *her*,” Marnie whispered, indicating Eloise.



“Eloise?”

“She’s the one who stole the valentines. Yesterday, I saw her stuff them into this pink duffel bag she has under

her desk. She thought we’d all gone home. But I came back to get my notebook. She didn’t see me.”

Eloise ricocheted across the room toward the two of us. “What are you two talking about?” she asked. “True confessions, Marnie?”

Marnie made a funny face. “You crack me up,” she said. “M.Y.O.B.”

I grinned. I wished I’d been the one to tell Eloise to mind her own beeswax.

Eloise puffed up her chest. “Well!” she cried. “How rude!”

And then it hit me: another gut feeling.

Eloise Elias was the one acting WEIRD. She was the bandit! I just knew it.

Thanks to Marnie’s honesty and directness, I was able to solve the mystery. We proved not only that Eloise was the bandit, but also that she wasn’t so perfect after all.

Eighth Period



When we came back from music, I knew I should tell Ms. Lodestar about Eloise. I just didn’t know how to do it. In the end, I didn’t have to say a word. Marnie came to my rescue again.

“Look what I found!” she said. She spotted one of the missing valentines poking out of a pocket in Eloise’s jean jacket.

“My funny valentine!” I cried.

Unfortunately, everyone else in class saw it. I hadn’t signed my name to it but now everyone knew it was mine—including Tommy. I’ve never been more embarrassed in my entire life.

But at least we got our trip back.

It was actually Ray who found Eloise’s pink duffel



**Marnie made a funny face.
“You crack me up,” she said. “M.Y.O.B.”**



“Fine! Be that way!” Eloise scoffed. Then she looked right at me. “Pippa, why don’t you tell me what you guys said?”

I crinkled up my eyebrows. “Uh . . .” I said. “It really *isn’t* your beeswax, Eloise. We were having a private conversation.”

bag—stuffed with the stolen cards—under Eloise’s coat in the back of the room. We all helped send this bandit to the principal’s office pronto.

Later on, Eloise admitted that she had swiped the cards because she didn’t want anyone in class to get more valentines than she did. And it turns out she



was right to be worried! Not a single valentine had been put into the box with her name on it.

Of course, you don't get secret admirers or friends by lying and being a nosy pest. Still, I felt bad for Eloise. She tries hard. She just wants to be the best. And to be liked by someone.

After the final bell of the day rang and we all gathered our stuff to go home, Marnie came over to me and Alex.

"Good job, detectives!" she cheered, slapping me on the back.

"I'm really sorry I doubted you . . . and I'm sorry I never talked to you before today, too," I said.

"Yeah, me too," Alex added.

"Friends?" I said to Marnie, sticking out a pinkie for a pinkie shake. Alex did the same.

Marnie grinned. "You guys are really funny."

"Funny *looking*!" I jeered.

We all laughed together.

By the time Ms. Lodestar dismissed us for the day, she had happily (and quickly) re-loaded our valentine box with all the missing cards.

She commended our teamwork in solving the problem—but she told us that we should all be nicer to Eloise. The next day, we would all have to make Eloise a valentine.

And as I looked around at my friends and classmates, I got another gut feeling, stronger than the other ones today.

True valentines weren't made from paper. They were friends—old and new.

And we *all* had a lot of heart. ★



Meet the Author



Age 10

Now

Laura Dower

Once I had a secret admirer who left me a Valentine's Day chocolate bar. It melted in my school locker, but I ate it anyway. I still make all my valentine cards by hand, and I think you should, too!

Ice Show


Design one of these sparkly costumes so your doll can skate in style.

Wrap Skirt

To make a skirt, cut fifteen 4- or 5-inch-long strips from **any fabric with a ruffled edge**. Cut a straight or scalloped bottom edge on each strip. Or for pleats, cut a V-shaped edge, and then fold the ribbon twice into a pleat.

Use **Glue Dots** to hold both folds closed. Then use the dots to overlap or align the strips along an 18-inch ribbon, leaving 3 inches on each end to tie the skirt in back.

Skating Shift

 For each dress, ask an adult if you can cut the sleeve off an **old prewashed T-shirt**. Cut a 1-inch slit 1½ inches from the hemmed edge for each armhole. Then cut the sleeve length to 7 inches. To make dress sleeves, cut a slit in a small section of the

same ribbon used for the skirt and slip it over each arm. Or use **Glue Dots** to attach the ribbon around the dress's armholes after the dress is on. (Remove the sleeves before removing the dress.) Decorate the dress front with **shiny trim** or **rhinestones**.

Caution!

Some fabric and ribbon dyes can transfer onto your dolls, so use light colors, don't get the costumes wet, and don't place them in the sun. Check your doll often.

If colors start to transfer, remove the outfit immediately. To be safe, use the outfits only for your doll's performances.



Simple Skates



If your doll doesn't have ice skates, make her a pair! Attach **mini clothespins** to your doll's boot soles with **Glue Dots**.

If you like, ask an adult to **spray-paint** the pins silver, and let dry before attaching them to the boots. ★


NEW
Department!

AG'S PUZZLE PAGE




LOVE GROWS

There are lots of pretty hearts in this tree. Read the questions below and write your answers in the blanks.

1. How many hearts with polka dots can you find? _____
2. In the tree, circle the heart just like the one that the squirrel is holding. 
3. How many upside-down hearts can you find? _____
4. Count **all** of the hearts on this page.
How many are there? _____



Illustrations: Binny Talib



**Some-bunny
loves you!**

Proppers Carefully cut along the dotted lines to remove your poster. ★

Photo: VGL/a collection/RF/Getty Images

★ American Girl



XOXO

★ American Girl®

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HELP!

Dear American Girl,

I'm the only girl on my hockey team. The skills aren't coming that easily to me, and so that's making me even more self-conscious. What Should I Do?

It's hard being the only *anything*. And when you're a girl on a boys' team, it can feel like you're under a hot spotlight. The best thing you can do is focus on your own improvement. Show up for practice, and work hard on your skills. The goal isn't to be the best—it's to *do your best*, every day. That's a great way to earn respect on any team.



Dear American Girl,

I'm very quiet. I don't talk because I worry that people will think that what I say is silly.

Quiet

It can be so hard for someone who is used to keeping her mouth shut to get up the nerve to say something. So start slowly. Ask people questions about the things they're talking about. Give compliments. Then work up to giving your own opinions. Sure, everybody says silly things from time to time, but what you *think* isn't silly. And saying what you think out loud helps to show who you are. So speak up!



Dear American Girl,

My hands start to feel so dry and itchy this time of year. Do you have any advice for me?

Really dry

In the winter, indoor and outdoor air can have less moisture. That can be hard on your skin. Hot showers can make skin even more dry, so stick to short, warm ones. Right after you towel off, slick on some moisturizing lotion, and re-apply whenever you feel itchy. Drinking water helps to keep your skin healthy, so try adding an extra glass each day. Wishing you an itch-free winter!



Dear American Girl,

I'm not allowed to watch the TV shows my friends do. And they make fun of me for that. NOT a baby!

If this is important to you, ask your parents why they don't want you to watch those shows, and look for a compromise. Could you watch one? Or could a parent watch with you? No matter what happens, you'll still have to deal with your friends' teasing. Next time someone gives you a hard time, try, "Not everyone's family has the same rules. I've got to live with that, so I'd appreciate it if you'd drop it."



MORE HELP!

Dear American Girl,

I'm talented in school and in music, but sometimes I feel as if I brag too much. I want to tell people about what I do, but I don't want to be a snob.

Big Mouth?

It's great that you're proud of your accomplishments. But to protect yourself from bragging, watch how people react to what you say. If they seem bored or annoyed, change the subject. Also, pay attention to how much you talk. Ask questions about others so that you're not just talking about yourself. Good for you for caring about your manners!



Dear American Girl,

Every girl I know has trouble with gossip at sleepovers. It's impossible to stop it, and it's not like you can just leave the party in the middle of the night. No clue what to do about it.

Help!

It's the worst feeling when you realize that talk at a party is turning mean. You don't want to

join in, but you don't want to be left out, either. Next time this happens, be the girl who always tries to send the talk in a new direction. The first time gossip starts, try: "Hey, let's keep it nice!" Then suggest something new to do, such as watching a movie or talking about spring break. But if gossip starts again, try: "C'mon—I'd feel awful if someone was saying this stuff about me. Or about any one of



you." Third time: "Seriously, can we please stop? Gossip makes me feel horrible." If your friends ignore your requests, then go only to sleepovers where there will be another girl who feels as you do. That way, you two can do something else when the trouble talk starts.



Dear American Girl,

I want to start babysitting this year, but my mom thinks I can't handle taking care of little kids. How can I convince her that I'm ready for the job?

sitter

The best way to convince others that you're ready to care for lots of kids is to do a great job of caring for just one—yourself. Getting your homework done, remembering to brush your teeth, and doing your chores without being asked can do a lot to show that you're mature. Ask your mom about her concerns, and find out what you can do to show her that you're ready for more responsibility. You also can take sitter classes to help you prepare.



even
MORE HELP!

Dear American Girl,

I need advice. A boy in my class asked me out. But I don't want to have a boyfriend—I'm only 9 years old!! What should I say?

Confused

No wonder you're confused—after all, life was far more simple when that boy just wanted to be your friend. But you don't have to look at this as a scary, complicated boy problem. It's really just a matter of saying no to something that's not right for you. And the right way to do that is to be polite but direct. "That's really nice! But I have to say no—I'm going to wait until I'm older to have a boyfriend."



Dear American Girl,

I want to be a vegetarian. People keep pressuring me to eat meat, but I don't want to because I love animals. I don't know what to do.

Animal lover

Bravo! You've found an idea that's important to you, and you want to do something to support it. But being vegetarian isn't simply about



avoiding meat. Start by talking to a parent or doctor about what your meatless diet should be like. You'll need to find new foods that will provide protein and other nutrients that you'll be missing by not eating meat, and you'll need support from a parent to do that. The next time someone pressures you about eating meat, try, "Hey, what's the big deal? This is just something that's important to me."



Dear American Girl,

I barely ever get to see my friends because I'm SO bad at making plans! I haven't even had a birthday party for a few years because I can't figure out what to do.

Problem Planner

You don't need a major plan to hang with friends. All you need are three simple things: time, date, and place. Answer those questions, and you've got a plan. Also, start thinking early about future fun. Two months before your birthday, decide what type of party you want—that way, you'll have plenty of time to figure out the rest. Ask a parent for help if you need it.



Advice from You

"I was being humiliated at school, but I didn't tell my mom because I was afraid that would make it worse. My mom found out on her own, though, and she stopped the bullying entirely. Don't be afraid to tell an adult about a problem like this."

Halie E.

Age 13, Alabama

Need advice? Got advice? Write: Help!

American Girl magazine

8400 Fairway Place

Middleton, WI 53562

This bedroom was one of the sets for our Color Blast party!



Aren't the kittens in our poster adorable? They live in a place where they're cared for until they're old enough to be adopted by local families. Want to watch a cute kitty video? Go to www.adoptapet.com

AG's Puzzle Page Answers:

1. 22

2.



3. 6

4. 157

Alessi M., age 12, of Florida drew an apple-shaped cupcake for our contest—then she and her friend Isa D., age 10, made apple cupcakes together. They look great!



To see more cupcake creations from girls like you, go to www.adoptapet.com/playmagazine

Behind the Scenes

It might be winter, but this issue is sunny and bright!



These two Minnesota readers, Emily P., age 10, and Sophia L., age 11, made the Cozy Cups from the January/February 2011 issue. We love those cute ladybugs!

Kelsy S., age 10, of Texas tested the "Rainbow Bites" from our Color Blast party. Thanks for showing us your colorful treats!



McKenna's [★] Take the Challenge!

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In her stories, McKenna learns to focus on her strengths and reach for her goals, one day at a time.

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 American Girl

*NO PURCHASE NECESSARY TO ENTER OR WIN. ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS WILL NOT BE CASHED IN FOR CASH. YOUR CHANCE OF WINNING DEPENDS ON HOW MANY TIMES YOU PLAY. GRAND PRIZE: A McKenna™ doll and three-book set. Odds vary by month. See www.americangirl.com/girloftheyear for details. Open to legal residents of the U.S. only. Ages 8-13 years old. Time of entry: January 1, 2012 to August 31, 2012. Subject to official rules available at www.americangirl.com/girloftheyear or by sending a self-addressed, stamped, #10 business envelope to: Girl of the Year, P.O. Box 420000, Madison, WI 53702-0000. Sponsored by American Girl Brands LLC, 4400 Fenwick Place, Madison, WI 53705.



American Girl

Illustrations: Carol Yoshizumi

Coming up in the April issue of *American Girl* magazine

Stick to It

You'll be amazed at the crafts that you can make with tape!

Up in the Air

See a sky full of kites designed by girls like you.

Egg-stra Cute

Decorate eggs in pretty spring colors.

Shower Power

Make rainy-day gear for your doll.



For more fun
and games, go to
americangirl.com/playmagazine



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Too-Cute Kitties

Hang this on your
bedroom doorknob and
then color in your poster.
Or turn it around to see
some aww-some kittens!



Carefully cut along the dotted line to remove your door hanger.



Come in
right meow!



Carefully cut out
along dotted lines.

CAT-ch
you later.



Photo: Laurie Cimoto

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Carefully peel your poster off of this tab.